

The Washington Post

Wednesday, August 24, 2011

By Janice D'Arcy



A parental aftershock: needing emergency childcare

What was a more seismic event in a parent's life in the region: [yesterday's earthquake](#) or today's school closings?

Many of us were counting blessings last night that the region's natural disaster was not as bad as it could have been. It was more a region-wide fire drill, a test run in case a real disaster strikes. By this morning, we expected all to be back on track.

Then the texts arrived for many parents where schools began this week: [schools closed today](#) to assess earthquake damage.

Suddenly we found ourselves in emergency mode again, this time scrambling for back-up care. "What was DCPS thinking?" one dad who took the morning off wrote to me.

Back-up childcare is a rare commodity here, especially for families who just began the school year. Finding an after-school sitter or program is hard enough for working parents.

A [recent study commissioned by Sittercity](#) found that more than half of parents surveyed cite finding an after-school sitter and arranging transportation logistics as the biggest stressors they face during the back- to-school season (56 percent), beating out buying back-to-school necessities such as clothes, notebooks, pens, paper, computers (42 percent).

The oddball school closing was not part of the survey, but it's a good bet that causes even more stress. At least with snowstorms that close schools, forecasts give us a warning. But the earthquake didn't provide much time to plan. ([The orangutan guttural holler](#) does not count as a fair warning.) So, many workers were forced to take today off — some not so

reluctantly as it was a beautiful day. But others surely have deadlines that will be missed, clients that will be disappointed, bosses who will be angry.

Now that many of us have been motivated to [create a family disaster plan](#), today has given us a reason to create an emergency childcare plan too.

How did you handle the school closings? Has it motivated you to come up with a back-up child care plan?